

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0517/01 0581620
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271620Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6858
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000517

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: COALITION PROFILE: TAWAFUQ CONFRONTS DIMINISHED ELECTORAL PROSPECTS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 263

[1B](#). BAGHDAD 333
[1C](#). BAGHDAD 454

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[11](#). (C) Summary: The Tawafuq coalition, centered around the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and once the predominant Sunni group in parliament, is in a state of continued decline as it heads into the March 7 elections. Down to only 25 seats in the Council of Representatives (COR) and with the loss of former IIP heavyweights VP Tariq al-Hashimi and DPM Rafi'e al-Issawi, Tawafuq is struggling to position itself as the most coherent, dependable, and non-Ba'athist option for Sunni voters. Unlike its main competitor for the Sunni vote, the Iraqiyya coalition, Tawafuq emerged from the recent de-Ba'athification crisis largely unscathed, but it is uncertain if it will pick up any significant support as a result. Polling data and the results of the January 2009 provincial elections suggest Tawafuq may win no more than 20 seats in an expanded 325 seat COR. Nevertheless, Tawafuq remains the grouping of choice for Sunni Islamists, who look with suspicion at more secular parties, and it may fare well in the government formation process as the most palatable and pliable Sunni partner for Shi'a and Kurdish parties. End Summary.

Background

[12](#). (C) Although still the largest Sunni coalition in Iraq's current COR, Tawafuq has withered to the point that its current membership is drawn almost completely from the IIP. Tawafuq lost its two main non-IIP partners, the National Dialogue Council and the Iraqi People's Conference, in the past year. The IIP, in turn, has fragmented, with former IIP leaders VP Hashimi and DPM Issawi having defected to the rival Iraqiyya coalition. (Note: Hashimi left after being ousted as the IIP's Secretary General. End Note.) The coalition now numbers 25 COR members, down from its high of 45 MPs. The minor parties in the coalition are the Independent National Tribal Gathering, the Iraqi Turkmen Justice Party and the National Gathering for the People of Iraq, which collectively have one seat in the outgoing COR.

Key Leaders

[13](#). (C) The most prominent national figure in Tawafuq is COR Speaker Iyad al-Samarrai'e IIP head Osama al-Tikriti is the second most recognizable member. Both were elected from Baghdad, and both were put forward as potential COR Speakers during government formation discussions in 2006. Should Tawafuq form part of the prevailing governing alliance following the March 7 elections, Samarrai'e and Tikriti would likely vie for the top position awarded to the coalition.

(Comment: Many observers predict that the main Sunni partner in the next government would once again be given the COR Speaker position. End Comment.)

Platform/Message

14. (C) Neither Tawafuq nor the IIP has spelled out much in the way of an issues-based platform to date. As religious parties appear to have fared poorly in the January 2009 provincial elections compared to their more secular competitors, Tawafuq may try to downplay the IIP's Islamist identity while being careful not to alienate its core supporters. Tikriti told Emboffs recently that the coalition would stress the importance of improving security and the provision of public services as main campaign themes. Given the recent uproar over the disqualification of candidates from the Iraqiyya coalition, Tawafuq's main rival for the Sunni vote, Tawafuq may try to market itself as the most coherent, dependable, and non-Ba'athist option for Sunni voters.

Strengths/Weaknesses

15. (C) **Strengths:** As noted above, the IIP managed to avoid much negative fallout resulting from the de-Ba'athification spectacle played out under the media spotlight (ref A). Speaker Samarrai'e the IIP's only remaining marquee figure, is one of the most visible politicians in the country and still commands a loyal following among Iraqi Sunnis. Also, very devout Sunnis often look upon secular parties with suspicion and may view the IIP as the voting option most compatible with their religious orientation.

16. (C) **Weaknesses:** The public perception of the IIP, and by extension Tawafuq, is one of a party in obvious decline. Its Islamist character, even if downplayed, will be an obstacle to attracting secular voters. Moreover, the strongly sectarian Tawafuq (despite the presence of nominal non-Sunni Arab partners) lies well outside the trend towards less religious, nationalist parties. Finally, the few provincial councils with substantial IIP blocs do not have a strong track record for providing services, although this may be due to factors beyond their control.

Projection

17. (C) With Tawafuq currently polling in the 6-7 percent range among the general population and capturing only 17-19 percent support in the Sunni community, its prospects for holding on to the 25 seats it still has in the COR are not bright. (Note: Reflecting its near-zero level of support among Shi'a voters nationally, Tawafuq is not even bothering to run candidates in six southern provinces. Neither is it fielding candidates in the three Kurdish provinces, but that could also be part of a strategy to curry favor with the Kurds by refraining from competing in Kurdish strongholds. End Note.) The IIP's poor showing in the January 2009 provincial elections also indicates that it will fare worse than it did in the December 2005 national vote, when it faced much less Sunni competition. In 2009, the IIP won just 13 percent of the provincial council seats in Baghdad and the four Sunni-majority provinces. Most strikingly, its share of seats in the Anbar provincial council plummeted from 34 to 0. Extrapolating from these two data sets, Tawafuq is unlikely to garner more than 15-20 seats of the 325 seats in the next COR. According to contacts, Tawafuq leaders are aware of the challenges they face in attracting voters, but believe they can win up to 30 parliamentary seats.

Government Formation Outlook

18. (C) Despite its limited electoral prospects, Tawafuq may

fare better than would be expected in the government formation process because of potential resistance by Shi'a and Kurdish parties to including Iraqiyya -- the coalition with the greatest Sunni support -- as the main Sunni partner in the next governing alliance. The main Shi'a coalitions, the Iraqi National Alliance (INA) and PM Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA), likely view Iraqiyya as more "Ba'athist" and less dependable and compliant relative to the IIP. The presence of the anti-Kurdish al-Hadba Gathering in Iraqiyya could similarly make the IIP a more attractive Sunni partner for the Kurds. In addition, Tawafuq, fearful of being left out in the cold due to its reduced electoral muscle, could be a more concessionary and compliant ally in government formation negotiations. The extent to which the Iraqiyya coalition fractures after the election also will play a large role in determining how much clout Tawafuq will have in the negotiations.

¶9. (C) Within this context, it appears that Tawafuq is courting, or is being courted by, Maliki's SLA with an eye to forming a post-election partnership. One overt sign of this has been the PM's support of the IIP's three-month-long struggle to block the seating of the governor-elect in Salah ad-Din province (ref B). (Note: The previous governor (IIP) was ousted by the provincial council in September 2009. End Note.) Post also has noted low-profile contacts between Osama al-Tikriti and the PM for the past couple of months. However, the continuing detention and harassment of IIP QHowever, the continuing detention and harassment of IIP provincial council members in Diyala, which may be directed by Maliki (ref C), remains a barrier to Tawafuq-SLA cooperation.

HILL